The Qualitative Report

Volume 2 | Number 2 Article 5

10-1-1995

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The Qualitative Report, Volume 2, Number 2, October, 1995

Classrooms are curious places. In newer schools and in older schools with newer ideas, early childhood classrooms are usually attractive to look at and interesting to be in. Several children are more likely to sit at a table together than to sit separately in individual desks. Some might even be on the floor or under the table.

A comfortable level of conversation among the children is expected, if not encouraged. Every corner and empty space is filled with something to look at, read, touch, or use in some way. If anything, there is too much to occupy one's attention. The teacher could be physically positioned anywhere in the space that is not already taken up by kids and things.

By contrast, typical university classrooms are relatively lackluster spaces, functional and somewhat multi-purpose. What organizes one's attention upon entering most of these classrooms are the rows of desks facing front. Facing back is the instructor's desk and maybe a podium. Apart from the ubiquitous dry erase board and perhaps an overhead projector, there is usually little else of note. Students and instructor alike enter such classrooms and take their designated places, either facing front or facing back without much, if any, thought.

In both of these contexts, early childhood classroom and university classroom, how we "do" school and formal learning have been culturally inscribed long before any single one of us ever shows up at the classroom door. Etched deeply into this cultural inscription is how teachers should do their teaching and how learners should do their learning, in what contexts, and according to what rules of relationship between them.

Yet, the early childhood classroom and the university classroom contain signifiers of different ways of interpreting the relationships between teaching, learning, passivity, activity, teacher, and student. These signifiers represent multiple ways in which the teaching and learning communities construct meanings about what they do and about how what they do should be carried out.

In the early childhood classroom, the signifiers of students moving about a room while working on a project and freely talking with each other and with a teacher suggest a particular conception of what the activities of teaching and learning are. The individual desks and the demarcation between the front facing students and the back facing instructor of a typical university classroom are signifiers suggesting an entirely different conception of what takes place there. Kincheloe (1991) states that "the school is a diamond mine for semiological study, for it abounds with codes and signs, in conventions which call for unique insight" (p. 150).

In examining the rules of relationship between teachers and students, Freire (1970) states that "a careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" (p. 57). In Freire's analysis of dominant models of Western teacher-student relationships, narrating and storytelling are proprietary rights of teachers. The most that students can do is react to the particular narratives presented to them.

Freire's (1970) critique suggests a larger, overriding narrative in which the nature of the teacher-student relationship is already substantially defined. He sees this encompassing narrative as entitling teachers, like plaintiffs in civil court and prosecutors in criminal court, to select the stories to be told and to set their initial boundaries. Other emancipatory educators like Illich (1971) and more recently, Gatto (1992), also critique dominant modes of educational practice. Educational reform is a topic of intense interest in our nation today and there are many participants in this conversation.

Yet these critiques are subject to further critique insofar as they compartmentalize the activities of teaching and learning and locate such activities in separate persons. Perhaps the re-visioning of *teaching*, *learning*, *schools*, and *classrooms* gets bogged down and stalled because of these very metaphors. The metaphors of *teaching* and *learning* suggest activities that are separate, dichotomous, and sequential to each other. The metaphors of *schools* and *classrooms* suggest physicality and specificity of location. The metaphors of *teacher* and *student*, conjure up images of separate and distinct persons engaged in complementary but qualitatively different activities.

If we think of the *teacher* as the speaker and the *student* as the listener, then Maranhao's (1991) appraisal of the metaphors of speaking and listening applies equally to the metaphors of *teacher* and *student*: "The metaphors of speaking and writing have exercised a true tyranny over the concept of communication, branding the speaker and the writer with the indelible mark of addressor and the listener and the reader as addressees" (p. 245). Bateson (1989) contends that there is nothing as toxic as a bad metaphor. Perhaps what the field of education and those who care about it have to contend with is a set of patently bad metaphors rooted in the rigid polarities of modernist thought.

Probably because I have spent most of my life in classrooms, in both the front facing desks of the students and the back facing desk of the instructor, I am engrossed by what goes on there. For some time I have been fascinated with the process of sensemaking--how people make sense out of their experience in the world.

Weick (1995) lists the questions that absorb those interested in sensemaking: "How they [i.e., active agents] construct what they construct, why, and with what effects, are the central questions for people interested in sensemaking" (p. 4). Sensemaking research, by virtue of its focus, asks people to generate not just "answers" or responses to questions that researchers pose, but also to articulate the questions that they must pose to themselves in order to answer the researcher's questions.

Sensemaking, as it is applied to the activities of teaching and learning, provides a means of attending to cultural inscriptions about education, while acknowledging that when people do

show up at the classroom door they influence that cultural inscription just as surely as they are influenced by it. Such a perspective is implicitly reflexive. The distinctions between self and other, teacher and learner, culture and individual become blurred.

My particular interest in sensemaking, to date, has focused on sensemaking in formal classroom situations (Duffy, 1995). What I have been interested in is how *students* ascribe and derive meanings about their own learning experiences and what assumptions and beliefs-in-action organize their identification of particular ideas and understandings as important.

As a consequence of my interest and research in the area of sensemaking, any lingering notions I had about teaching and learning as separate activities, carried out by distinct persons have been thoroughly dismantled. In this previous research I described the experience of making sense out of the sensemaking of the students who participated in the project:

I as the instructor/researcher became a learner/student as I reflected upon and explored my own processes of observing and making sense of the processes of observing and sensemaking of the students with whom I interacted in the class and in the research. For all of us participating in the class and research experience, the distinctions between student and instructor, instructor and researcher, researcher and student became necessarily blurred. These 'roles' represented the multiplicity of positions which we all (i.e., instructor and students) assumed and moved among in the context of the class-research experience. (Duffy, 1995, p. 122)

I would note that the processes of *teaching/learning* also involve the process of *researching* pre-existing attitudes, perspectives, beliefs, and understandings, making *researchers* of all *teachers/learners*.

Viewing teaching, learning, and researching as contextually defined interwoven perspectives and activities performed by all participants in the classroom places the central experiences of learning in "the intersubjective domain where interpretation occurs in community with others" (Pare, 1995, p. 3). This view of teaching, learning, and researching as an intersubjective activity accords with social constructionist approaches to understanding human experience. Leeds-Hurwitz, cited in Pearce (1995) identifies the common characteristics of social constructionist approaches as "(1) an acceptance of the social construction of reality; (2) the implied need for taking a reflexive stance in research; (3) a sociocultural, rather than an individual, focus for the study of communication; and (4) investigation of symbols" (p. 91).

My current interest in sensemaking research is taking a more applied direction insofar as I am eager to explore what the practice implications are of taking an explicit stance of collaborative inquiry with all classroom participants. Pragmatic questions arising from this understanding of teaching, learning, and researching as a unitary, collaborative activity instead of as separate activities are: (a) what classroom practices best represent this collaborative, unitary view (b) how will teacher-student interaction be different in classrooms embodying this collaborative, unitary view (c) how will "students" and "teachers" experience themselves and make sense out of this experience, and (d) what classroom signs will indicate the presence of this collaborative, unitary understanding of teaching, learning, and researching.

As a starting point for this new direction in my sensemaking teaching/learning/researching I reflected upon the starting point in most research; namely, the formulating of the research question(s). Ordinarily the development of the research question(s) is grounded in the researcher's interests, availability of sponsorship and funding, and accountability to institutional employers and sponsors. Rarely is the formulating of the research question(s) done in partnership with the intended informants or more appropriately, participants, in the project.

One practice implication, it seems to me, in assuming a collaborative stance in educational inquiry is to include the participants in the formulating of the research question(s). For example, my experience as a classroom insider suggests to me that all participants in the classroom have some level of investment in the outcome of the learning experiences they are a part of. Even if that investment is as deceptively simple as wanting the class or course to be "fun" or "interesting."

Like the "students," I, as the "instructor," also want the course to be both engaging and worthwhile. If I simply ask the "students" what their impressions of the course were, I am likely to get their narratives of assessment and evaluation of that particular course. If, on the other hand, I ask the students to formulate the questions they ask themselves in order to evaluate their learning experiences, I obtain information about the criteria they use in making sense out of learning experiences, and I obtain sets of research questions that the "students" are already using to research their own learning.

In this example, the "students'" questions were contextualized by my question and, in turn, future questions of mine will be contextualized by their questions. This is but one example of a procedure for explicitly articulating a collaborative approach to classroom teaching, learning, and researching. This work is ongoing and is directed towards outlining practice implications of a collaborative inquiry stance in educational systems.

Appendix

You, the reader may be interested in reviewing the questions that "students" generated, as per the above example, in response to the prompt question, "What questions do you ask yourself when evaluating whether you have learned something in a class you have taken?"

I have grouped the response questions into three different categories: (a) learning as a "body" of knowledge--a corpus, a thing; (b) learning as a change process, (c) learning as application and involvement in the real world, and (d) learning as ethical activity.

LEARNING AS A "BODY" OF KNOWLEDGE--A CORPUS, A THING

1. Have I grasped the concepts from the course?
2. How much of the material have I retained?
3. How do you attach the new learning to materials already learned or known?
4. How much more do I now know?

LEARNING AS A CHANGE PROCESS

1. How has my life or behavior changed?
2. Does it change the way I look at the world?
3. Does it challenge my existing knowledge?
4. Has my perception of the class changed since taking the class?
5. What is different from what I knew before? What have I added to what I knew before? What have I revised from what I knew before?

LEARNING AS APPLICATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE REAL WORLD

1. Can I use the information in future situations?
2. Will I be able to apply the information outside? In the workplace?
3. Does what I have learned make sense in my life? In my personal life?
4. Am I able to apply the theories in practice?
5. What is the practical application of this course?
6. Could I discuss clearly other examples related to the subject matter discussed?
7. Could I ask a question that would amplify what has just been discussed?
8. Can I explain the idea to someone else?
9. Am I going to pass?

LEARNING AS ETHICAL ACTIVITY

1. Can I use the information to help others?
2. What information did I deem pertinent enough to integrate into my existing set of beliefs/morals/values?
3. What information did I value enough to pass on?

This research is part of an ongoing project that will be described in upcoming articles.

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